

# DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 037 640

AC 006 639

AUTHOR Cantor, Marjorie H.  
TITLE VISTA -- A Source of Recruitment for the Helping Professions?  
INSTITUTION Columbia Univ., New York, N.Y. School of Social Work.  
REPORT NO GEO-478  
PUB DATE Jun 68  
NOTE 40p.; VISTA Research Project, Report II

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-\$0.25 HC-\$2.10  
DESCRIPTORS \*Human Services, Individual Characteristics, \*Professional Occupations, \*Recruitment, Research, \*Volunteers  
IDENTIFIERS VISTA, \*Volunteers in Service to America

## ABSTRACT

Although motives vary, most VISTA Volunteers bring with them a service orientation and a genuine desire to work with people. But few enter with any prior experience in the social welfare field or any clear picture of the particular nature of the helping role. The majority of Volunteers are at a turning point in their development as they leave the student culture and move out into the adult world of work. It is not surprising therefore that the VISTA experience should have profound effects on them personally and on their career aspirations. This research project studies a group of VISTA Volunteers who worked among the urban poor from 1966 to 1968, analyzing aspects of their adjustment to agency, job, and life in the neighborhood with the poor. This report discusses the impact of VISTA service on career choices. The findings indicate that one year of VISTA service acts to clarify goals, narrow vocational choices, and transform a generalized interest in service into specific commitment to the human service professions, particularly social work and education. (For other reports, see AC 002 352, AC 006 640, and AC 006 641.) (MF)

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VISTA - A SOURCE OF RECRUITMENT  
FOR THE HELPING PROFESSIONS?



The research reported herein was supported by  
The Office of Economic Opportunity, Washington, D. C.  
Contract No. OEO-478.

CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEMONSTRATION  
OF THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
2 EAST 94 STREET  
NEW YORK, N. Y.

ED037640

VISTA - A SOURCE OF RECRUITMENT  
FOR THE HELPING PROFESSIONS?

Marjorie H. Cantor, Director  
VISTA Research Project  
Columbia University School of  
Social Work

Report II

June, 1968

The Columbia University School of Social Work | New York, N.Y. 10028

Trafalgar 6-6300  
2 East 91st Street

June 12, 1968

Mr. Albert Maisel, Director  
Program Planning and Evaluation  
VISTA, Washington  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Maisel:

In accordance with our contract with the Office of Economic Opportunity, I am pleased to submit this study of the impact of VISTA service on the career aspirations of VISTA Volunteers working in urban poverty during the years 1966-1968. This is the second monograph to be issued by the VISTA Research Project of the Columbia University School of Social Work dealing with various aspects of VISTA in the inner city.

This report presents findings on the immediate post-VISTA plans and long-range career choices of the group of urban VISTA Volunteers followed for the last three years by the VISTA Research Project. The data for this study was gathered principally from an end-of-service questionnaire mailed to all Volunteers at the completion of their year of VISTA service.

This research would not have been possible without the assistance and co-operation of the VISTA staff in Washington and the regions. The Sponsoring Agencies and the Volunteers were most generous in giving of their time. Above all they desired to paint a full picture of urban VISTA and its impact on the Volunteers.

I trust that these findings will be of value to VISTA. In the Summary and Implication section we have noted some implications of the material from our vantage point and would be only too happy to discuss them further with you and any other members of the VISTA staff.

In closing, may I thank you for the opportunity to work with you and with VISTA.

Sincerely,

*Marjorie H Cantor*

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Marjorie H. Cantor, Director  
VISTA Research Project  
Columbia University School of  
Social Work

MHC:dk



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have helped make this research possible. VISTA has from the beginning encouraged and cooperated with our efforts.

The Columbia University School of Social Work and Acting Dean Sidney Berengarten through their deep interest in VISTA made this research possible.

Dean Samuel F. Finestone, Assistant Dean and Director of the Research and Demonstration Center, of which this project is a part, has been a close advisor and warm friend. His wise guidance has been most encouraging to all involved.

No research project is possible without its staff. The preparation of this report was chiefly the responsibility of Mrs. Mary J. Mayer, Research Assistant, assisted by Mrs. Dahlia Sommer, Research Assistant. Miss Karen Wagner, Senior Research Assistant has been an active collaborator in all phases of the VISTA Research Project. Without the tireless efforts of Miss Dorothea Kehaya, the Project Secretary, our work would have been impossible.

The Columbia University VISTA Training Staff were most supportive of this research. Through their efforts it was possible to establish close contacts with the VISTA Volunteers. One of the most gratifying aspects of the VISTA Research Project was the positive working relationship between practice and research.

To the VISTA Volunteers, their Sponsoring Agencies and Direct Supervisors who welcomed our field visits and gave so generously of their time, particular appreciation is expressed.

Marjorie H. Cantor  
Director  
VISTA Research Project

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. . . . .	i
SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS . . . . .	1
BACKGROUND. . . . .	8
Introduction . . . . .	8
Research Questions . . . . .	8
Study Design. . . . .	10
Characteristics of the VISTA Volunteers. . . . .	11
Respondents of the Present Study. . . . .	12
VISTA Experience of the Respondents . . . . .	14
FINDINGS . . . . .	16
Volunteers' Short Range Plans . . . . .	16
School. . . . .	17
Work . . . . .	18
Rejoin VISTA. . . . .	18
Other . . . . .	19
Long-Range Vocational Plans of the Volunteers . . . . .	19
Crystallization of Volunteers' Career Plans . . . . .	19
Shifts in Career Plans During the Year . . . . .	22
Social Work and Education as Career Choices . . . . .	24
Effect of VISTA Job on Volunteers' Long-Range Career Plans. . . . .	25
The Impact of the VISTA Year . . . . .	27
Increase in Knowledge and Experience . . . . .	28
Changes in Self-Image . . . . .	28
Clarification of Professional Goals . . . . .	29

### APPENDIX A: Questionnaire

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

VISTA for the young people who enter its ranks represents many things. For most, in the first instance, it means a service opportunity -- a chance to do something for someone else.

However, there are other more personal secondary motives as well. Many college graduates leave the universities unsure of exactly what they want to do. VISTA offers them another "last chance" to explore before final career commitments are made.

For others, who drop out of college because of personal problems or lack of clear direction, VISTA represents an acceptable opportunity to work constructively through "hang ups" and achieve self-actualization. Hopefully the VISTA year will enable such students to return to college with a clearer sense of direction.

Still others, faced with the draft, seek out VISTA as a chance to serve their country in a non-military capacity.

Although motives vary, most VISTA Volunteers bring with them a service orientation and a genuine desire to work with people. But few enter with any prior experience in the social welfare field or any clear picture of the particular nature of the helping role. The majority of Volunteers are at a turning point in their development as they leave the student culture and move out into the adult world of work. It is not surprising therefore that the VISTA experience should have profound effects on them personally and on their career aspirations.



The VISTA Research Project has chartered the progress of a typical group of VISTA Volunteers, who worked in urban poverty from 1966-1968 in many aspects of their adjustment to agency, job and life in the neighborhood with the poor. In this present report we are concerned with the impact of VISTA service on career choices. Our findings indicate that one year of VISTA service acts to clarify goals, narrow vocational choices and transform a generalized interest in service into specific commitment to a human service profession -- particularly social work and education.

## FINDINGS OF STUDY

### Immediate Plans of Volunteers

Volunteers were asked to indicate their plans for the twelve month period immediately following the end of their year of VISTA service. Of the total group of 111 seventy-seven, or 69% replied. The largest single group of respondents (47%) planned to return to college or graduate school. About one-fifth elected to work (principally in poverty programs or a helping profession) while one-fourth chose to re-enlist in VISTA for another year. The remaining 8% were in military service, retiring, or married and not working.

College dropouts were no more apt to return to school than were college graduates; about half of each group indicated school plans. The high interest in professional training among "college graduate" Volunteers appears indicative of the growing importance of such training as a precondition to advancement in our society. But equally important to the Volunteers, according to their comments, was the fact that advanced training could help them more effectively serve the poor.

Why more college dropouts did not choose to return to school may at first seem puzzling in the light of the finding that most planned to return to school when they entered VISTA. A high proportion of college dropouts not returning to school, however, elected to rejoin VISTA for another year. The findings indicate that some students who interrupt college to join VISTA, need more than one year to clarify personal and career goals.

Rejoining VISTA was also the choice of most of the middle-aged and elderly Volunteers for whom defining and preparing for a career was less of a consideration.

#### Long Range Vocational Plans of Volunteers

A study of the long range plans of the 77 urban Volunteers indicates the full impact of VISTA service on career choices. Although many of the Volunteers entered VISTA with a specific career in mind, approximately one-third began the year without clear cut vocational goals. The VISTA experience helped this group resolve their uncertainties, and directed them towards a vocational choice. By the end of the year, most respondents had some direction in mind and almost three-quarters could report a single field which they planned to enter.

#### Nature of Careers Planned

The very nature of the self-selection process involved in joining VISTA implies an interest in people and the helping process. The VISTA selection procedure further limits the group to those able to put their service inclination into programmatic practice. It is, therefore, not surprising that eight out of ten of the Volunteers came to VISTA envisioning a career in either a helping

or quasi-helping profession.<sup>1</sup>

The VISTA experience acted to reinforce this interest. Exposure to a real job in a helping setting made those originally oriented toward service more sure of their direction and attracted to the human service fields Volunteers whose pre-VISTA career plans were vague or unspecified. By the end of the VISTA year, 70% of the Volunteers elected one of the helping professions; 15% preferred a quasi-helping profession, while the remaining 15% were scattered among other careers in business, the arts and sciences.

Of the 73 respondents choosing a helping profession, 90% selected either social work or education. Social work was not only the choice of the largest number of Volunteers but showed the largest single gain of any field in both number and proportion of Volunteers.

Although social work and education were popular choices among the women Volunteers, the number of male volunteers attracted to social work is significant. At the beginning of the VISTA year only three men indicated a preference for social work. By the end of the year, the number of men choosing social work had tripled and of the nineteen social work recruits nine were men. Perhaps VISTA gave these young men their first concrete experience with male social workers in responsible and exciting positions. It should also be noted, that the majority of the Volunteers came from middle and upper middle class backgrounds, not traditionally a source of recruitment for such professions as social work and education.

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<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this study helping professions include social work, education, health services (physical and mental) and library sciences. Quasi-helping encompass government, law, the ministry and research in social sciences (i. e., urban problems).

### The Process of Career Choice

The process of vocational clarification which occurred during the VISTA year entailed considerable shifting from field to field (even among Volunteers who started VISTA with preconceived vocational plans). Over half of the group shifted career choices during the course of the year. This finding suggests that while Volunteers entered VISTA leaning heavily toward helping careers, they were not really committed to a specific helping profession. Most changes occurred from one helping profession to another (i. e. , education to social work, etc. ). Shifts from helping to "non-helping" careers were rare.

No discernible relationship was evident between the type of VISTA job held by the Volunteer and his/her final career choice. The totality of the helping process to which Volunteers were exposed rather than specific tasks or settings, appears most controlling with respect to career choices.

In commenting about their process of career choice, Volunteers stressed the role of VISTA in shaping their future. VISTA service helped expand and extend their knowledge and experience. Their self-image was sharpened or changed and they gained new perspectives about themselves and their potentials.

### IMPLICATIONS

The implications of the foregoing findings go beyond VISTA and the VISTA Volunteers. If through VISTA service outstanding young people are to be attracted to the helping professions, it is not enough that Volunteers leave VISTA after one year of service committed to the human service endeavors. To what extent can this commitment be transformed into professional training and career involvement? Only such a transformation can insure that VISTA

fulfills its potential as a viable point of entry into the helping professions.

The first step in assisting Volunteers to put career aspirations into reality has already been taken by the Volunteer Information Service of VISTA itself. This Service offers Volunteers assistance in career planning, college admissions, financial aid and employment opportunities. The cooperation of educational institutions and professional groups is continually solicited.

But the primary responsibility for encouraging and enabling worthy Volunteers to enter the human service professions must lie with the professions themselves and the educational institutions responsible for professional training (particularly the schools of Education, Social Work, Medicine and Public Health). As a first step such groups need to recognize the significance and relevance of the VISTA experience. During VISTA service, Volunteers are deeply involved with the poor in helping roles such as counseling and intervening on behalf of individuals, leading recreational programs, organizing in the community for social action, teaching, tutoring, working with Head Start youngsters and parents, and training illiterate adults and the mentally retarded, etc. Many are attached to outstanding schools and social agencies and work under close professional supervision. All became intimately knowledgeable about the culture of poverty. Given such VISTA experience and their college backgrounds, the more competent Volunteers are natural candidates for the various helping professions. Our findings indicate that VISTA service reinforces the Volunteers, predisposition to enter such professions. But specific steps must be taken to capitalize on this rich recruitment potential. Among the things which might be considered by the professions are more active recruitment programs among VISTA Volunteers both while in service and upon completion of their VISTA year; increased sources



of financial assistance for needy Volunteers; advanced college or graduate credit for certain aspects of VISTA experience and cooperative programs between graduate school and VISTA, so that VISTA training is considered part of graduate education.

Although to date VISTA has attracted mainly white Volunteers, the number of Negro and Puerto Rican VISTAS is growing. Particular attention needs to be paid to VISTA as a recruitment source for sorely needed professional candidates from minority group and deprived backgrounds. Where such Volunteers have shown outstanding competence in helping roles, their VISTA record might be considered as compensation for possible educational deficiencies.

For VISTA, itself, the findings have significant implications for the recruitment of new Volunteers. If in fact, VISTA service acts to clarify career goals and enables Volunteers to serve as apprentices under professional supervision in a real work setting, these points are well worth making to potential recruits. Many college graduates, college dropouts and older people alike would welcome the opportunity afforded by VISTA to test vocational interests. The process of self-discovery and self-actualization which takes place in VISTA in no way detracts from the Volunteers' ability to serve the poor. On the contrary, commitment to a career in a helping or quasi-helping profession, based on realistic knowledge of what is involved, can only result in more and better service for those in need.

## BACKGROUND

### INTRODUCTION

In setting up VISTA in 1964, Congress had as its prime purpose the provision of essential volunteer manpower for the War Against Poverty. At the same time it recognized that exposure to the helping professions<sup>1</sup> during the course of VISTA service, might encourage intellectually and ideologically superior young people to elect to enter the ranks of such professions. Given the critical shortage of social workers, teachers and health service professionals, any substantial increase in potential candidates for the human service fields would have considerable national significance.

The present study measures the impact of the VISTA experience on the career choices of a group of 111 VISTA Volunteers serving in urban poverty during the years 1966-1968. An attempt is made not only to document the final vocational choices of these Volunteers but the process of choice as well.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Findings to date<sup>2</sup> point to certain basic assumptions about the nature of VISTA and the Volunteers. As a new dynamic program concerned with service, community organization, and social change in poverty areas, VISTA attracts

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<sup>1</sup> Although there is no one generally accepted definition of the "helping professions," the term is generally used to include social work, education, and health services (including physical and mental). In recent days there has been some pressure to include law, ministry and government within the confines of the helping professions. For purposes of this report we restrict the term helping professions to include social work, education, health services (including doctors, nurses, psychologists, therapists etc.) and library science. Law, the ministry and government are considered para- or quasi-helping professions within the context of this report.

<sup>2</sup> Cantor, Marjorie, Today Is Tomorrow, Report I of VISTA Research Project, VISTA Washington, 1967.

many dedicated able college trained young people strongly oriented to the helping process and direct involvement with people. This initial self-selection is further accentuated by VISTA's own selection process which accepts as Volunteers only candidates reasonably able to translate "desire to serve" into effective programatic practice. Once selected, "people-oriented" Volunteers are exposed to a variety of established viable human service programs<sup>1</sup> in which helping professionals play an active role as colleagues and supervisors.

Given the Volunteers' proclivity towards service and the working exposure to social agency and helping professions certain hypotheses emerge. The present research, therefore, addresses itself to the following research questions stemming from these hypotheses:

1. What types of careers are envisioned by urban VISTA Volunteers prior to their entrance into VISTA service? To what extent are their original plans altered as a result of VISTA service?
2. To what extent does one year in VISTA act to crystallize generalized interest in service into specific career choices in the helping professions?
3. If Volunteers choose the helping professions, to which specific discipline are they most attracted?
4. Does the nature of the specific VISTA job held by the Volunteer influence career choices?

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<sup>1</sup> In urban poverty these social welfare programs include traditional social agencies such as settlement houses, casework agencies, health and rehabilitation services, as well as newer community action programs, job training projects and the outreach efforts of the public schools in ghetto areas.

5. To what extent do Volunteers at the end of service recognize the need for advanced training? Are college graduates more likely to return to school than college dropouts?

6. Can VISTA reasonably be seen by the various helping professions as a viable point of entry and a potential source of recruitment for sorely needed helping professionals?

### STUDY DESIGN

The study presented herein is part of a larger three year research effort concerned with a variety of aspects of VISTA in urban poverty. The research design of the overall study involves following the progress of a group of 111 Volunteers from the inception of their VISTA training through their year of service in urban poverty and concluding with their post-VISTA plans. The study Volunteers were chosen by VISTA Washington without any special design from among the pool of eligible "urban" applicants, and sent for training to the Columbia University School of Social Work in staggered training classes over an eleven month period, September 1965 to July 1966. VISTA service was similarly staggered and the Volunteers under study completed their year of service in September 1967. A previous report has presented findings on the Volunteers, their training, the agencies for whom they worked and the effectiveness of their service to the poor.<sup>1</sup>

Questions pertaining to future plans were included in the interview held with each Volunteer after four months on the VISTA job and in a mail questionnaire sent to all Volunteers at the end of service. The end-of-service

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<sup>1</sup> Cantor, op.cit.

questionnaire, both because of timing and focus, provides the major data with respect to career choice and is the instrument most frequently referred to in this report. (See Appendix A for copy of this questionnaire).

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE VISTA VOLUNTEERS

In measuring the impact of VISTA on career choices, several important characteristics of the Volunteers under study must be kept in mind. (The demographic characteristics of our sample are fairly typical of all VISTA Volunteers).

First and perhaps most striking is the youth of the Volunteers. Ninety percent are 25 years or younger and two-thirds range in age from 20 to 23.

Evenly divided between men and women, most Volunteers are white, single and come from middle-class or affluent backgrounds. Their fathers hold mainly professional, semi-professional or managerial positions.<sup>1</sup>

The Volunteers are mainly college educated. Half have finished college and most of the rest have completed some college, and expect to return to school at the end of their VISTA service. However as a group they cannot be considered highly trained. The majority are typical of those on the first rung of the American professional ladder -- the liberal arts graduate. Even the few who have completed professional training have rarely practiced their professions. For most, VISTA service represents their first experience with the adult job world.

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<sup>1</sup> The professional -- managerial skew of the occupational distribution of the fathers of the VISTA sample is considerable. The U.S. Department of Labor in Employment and Earnings, Vol. VI, No. 12, June 1960 reports that 53% of general population are in skilled or unskilled occupations as compared with 37% of the "VISTA fathers," while 21% of the general population are in professional or managerial positions as compared with 63% of the "VISTA fathers."



In the first instance, most Volunteers are motivated to join VISTA by a desire to serve. But career exploration and self-actualization are important secondary motivating factors.

In the past, similar middle and upper-middle class young people have tended to follow their fathers into management and the professions of law and medicine. A disproportionately small number have chosen the helping professions, particularly social work<sup>1</sup> and education. It may well be that VISTA and the Peace Corps will be a factor in reversing this trend, and will be instrumental in attracting greater numbers of "upper socio-economic" young people to service vocations.

#### RESPONDENTS OF PRESENT STUDY

All 111 Volunteers involved in the large research effort were interviewed after four months on the VISTA job and received questionnaires in the mail upon completion of service.<sup>2</sup> Seventy-seven of this group, or 69%, returned the mail questionnaire.

To what extent do the 77 respondents resemble or differ from the total group of 111 Volunteers? An examination of variables such as sex, education, income, VISTA job, and success as a Volunteer indicates that the sample of 77 Volunteers does not differ significantly from the total group, except in one respect.

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<sup>1</sup> Arnulf M. Pins in his 1963 study Who Chooses Social Work, When and Why found that only 19% of the first year social work students came from professional backgrounds, while 32% of the social work students are from working class backgrounds. He concludes that social workers tend to be drawn from upwardly mobile lower or lower middle class homes. Studies of teachers indicate that a similar lower - lower middle class background is most usual.

<sup>2</sup> The end of service questionnaire, both because of timing and focus, provides the major data with respect to career choice and is the instrument most frequently referred to in this report. (See Appendix A for copy of this questionnaire).

It would appear that the respondents represent those Volunteers who are clearer about their goals and have more firmly resolved their future plans. Although all questions about immediate and future plans contained options of "not sure," "plans not yet decided," these choices were rarely used by the respondents.

An age distribution of Volunteers returning the questionnaires is further illustrative of the more settled nature of the 77 respondents. Older Volunteers age 22 and over, most of them had completed college, were more apt than younger Volunteers to return the questionnaire, as can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. End of Service Questionnaire Returns by Age

<u>Age of Volunteer</u>	<u>Number of Volunteers In Original Study Population</u>	<u>Number of Volunteers Returning Questionnaire</u>	<u>Proportion of Each Age Group Responding</u>
18-21	50	22	44
22-25	49	38	78
26 and over	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>100</u>
Total	111	77	69

Among the 24 non-respondents, there is a high proportion of college students who dropped out of school to join VISTA. Many such students brought with them unresolved personal and career problems. Most college dropouts when interviewed at the four month point, specified they planned to return to school after VISTA. However, after only one year of service some do not appear ready to make definite commitments on when and where.

The fact that the respondents appear to be more heavily weighted towards the older more settled Volunteers does not appear to be a limitation in the case of the present study.

Our goal is to evaluate the effect of VISTA on career plans. If anything, the findings which follow may underrepresent the impact of VISTA on career choice as more "uncertain" Volunteers resolve their vocational plans.

### VISTA EXPERIENCE OF THE RESPONDENTS

During their year of service the 77 Volunteers reported on herein, performed a variety of jobs in many types of sponsoring agencies. All sponsors were located in urban areas, most in cities with populations of 500,000 or over. Clients were principally Negro or Puerto Rican and most Volunteers lived among the poor with whom they worked.

The largest block of Volunteers were attached to the large recently organized multi-facet community action programs (in most cases, the major anti-poverty program in the community). The next largest group were in settlement houses offering traditional services as well as new outreach programs. Another substantial group had as their sponsoring agency educational institutions (including the Boards of Education of major cities as well as private job training programs). Almost two-thirds of the Volunteers were in these three types of agencies.

Volunteers were assigned to a variety of tasks in their sponsoring agency including organizing residents into social action groups; counseling clients and intervening on their behalf; tutoring and teaching; manning service programs for the aged and mentally retarded; making home visits; recruiting; and organizing and leading self-help and recreational programs. When the jobs of the Volunteers were classified according to their major task component, we find that about half (52%) of the Volunteers were involved in service jobs

(including service to individuals and service to recreational and self-help groups). Another 25% worked as community organizers, while the remaining fourth were principally engaged in teaching, tutoring or assisting teachers. Most of the teaching, etc., was done in educational settings, while the bulk of the organizing and direct service occurred under the sponsorship of what has been traditionally designated as social welfare agencies. In most instances Volunteers received moderately close and sustained supervision by a member of the agency staff. The majority of supervisors had some professional training. The largest number were social workers but Volunteers were also supervised by teachers, principals, lawyers and psychologists.

During the four month interviews, the Volunteers were asked to evaluate their jobs and supervisors. Responses indicated a high degree of satisfaction with both. (Of the 77 Volunteers who replied to the follow-up questionnaire, 82% expressed satisfaction with their jobs).

The non-respondents, it should be noted, reported as much enthusiasm and satisfaction as did the Volunteers who replied to the end-of-service questionnaire.

## THE FINDINGS

### VOLUNTEERS' SHORT-RANGE PLANS

In the end-of-service questionnaire, the Volunteers were asked their plans for the immediate twelve month period following the end of their VISTA service. Their responses are shown below. Also shown are the responses of 977 VISTA Alumni to a similar question asked of all VISTA Alumni by VISTA Washington. The 977 Alumni reporting represent approximately 44% of the total VISTA alumni as of December, 1967.

Table 2. Volunteers' Plans for 12 Months Immediately  
Following Year of Service

<u>Plan</u>	<u>Volunteers In</u> <u>Study Sample</u>		<u>977 VISTA Alumni</u>	
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Attend School	36	61	511	52
Work	17	29	352	36
Military Service, Retired, Married, not Working	6	10	114	12
	<u>59</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>977</u>	<u>100</u>
Rejoin VISTA <sup>1</sup>	18	23% of total group		

As can be seen above, somewhat more of the study respondents elected to return to school, while somewhat fewer planned to work than among the 977 VISTA Alumni but the differences are not statistically significant. It would appear that in any given group of Volunteers completing VISTA service, a substantial proportion (probably half or more) will be school bound. Among both our sample and the 977 VISTA Alumni reporting as of December, 1967, a

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<sup>1</sup> The national VISTA figures do not include Volunteers who re-enlist. Such re-enlistments are therefore shown separately in the table and are not included in overall percentages.



substantial proportion of those working are employed in poverty programs both on the federal and local level.

### Attend School

The importance of school in post-VISTA planning is underscored by the high proportion of the sample, 47% who plan to return to college or university. (A sizeable proportion of those going back to school also planned to work part-time while studying or to work until the beginning of the school term -- sometimes as much as six months away).

To what extent did the years of schooling completed prior to entering VISTA influence whether or not Volunteers elected to return to school after VISTA? Were students who interrupted college more prone to return to school than college graduates? The following table is illustrative.

Table 3. Plans for Next 12 Months According to Volunteers'  
Educational Level Prior to Entering VISTA

<u>Plans</u>	<u>Proportion of Volunteers at Each Educational Level</u>			
	<u>High School Or Less</u>	<u>Some College</u>	<u>College and/or Graduate School</u>	<u>All Respondents</u>
Total	100	100	100	100
Return to School	33	48	48	47
Rejoin VISTA	50	26	18	23
Work	17	16	28	22
Other	--	10	8	8
Number of Cases	( 6)	(31)	(40)	(77)

The above comparison indicates that "the return to school rate" among college graduate respondents was the same as among "college dropouts." Approximately half of each group planned to return to the universities after VISTA. The high proportion of college graduates seeking advanced training seems to reflect two mutually compatible trends: A growing awareness among

young people that a graduate degree is precondition for advancement in our society and a realization on the part of Volunteers that professional training would enable them to meet the needs of the poor more effectively.

It is striking, however, to note that at the end of their year in VISTA service only 48% of the Volunteers who dropped out of college to join VISTA were prepared to return to school (although almost all planned such a return when they entered VISTA). As has been noted previously, it is likely that many of the "college dropouts" at the end of one year of service were still in the process of clarifying personal and career goals. Among college dropouts not returning to school re-enlistment in VISTA was the most popular plan. Apparently rejoining VISTA offered for some an acceptable means of postponing decisions. College graduates on the other hand, not choosing to return to graduate school, were more likely to go to work.

### Work

Most of those electing to work<sup>1</sup> were, as noted, Volunteers who had completed their education prior to entering VISTA. (See Table 3). All but a fraction of those working were employed in either a poverty program or one of the helping professions. (Of the 17, two were employed by the agencies they served as VISTAS, five were in other poverty programs and six were working in other human service agencies. Only four had jobs in non-helping fields).

### Rejoin VISTA

More men than women chose to continue in VISTA for another year (11 of

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<sup>1</sup> Of those who plan to work while studying are added to this group, 43% of the Volunteers expected to be in the labor force: 22% working only; 12% working primarily while engaged in some study; and 9% studying full-time but working to a limited extent.

the 18 were male Volunteers). Because those who chose a second year in VISTA expressed no greater satisfaction with their experience than did the total group, it is highly likely that draft considerations entered into many of the decisions. However, rejoining VISTA as has been noted was popular among the "college dropouts" and was also the choice of middle aged and elderly Volunteers in the group for whom defining and preparing for a career was less of a consideration.

### Other

Only two Volunteers immediately anticipated military service, while four cited other plans (traveling, motherhood).

### LONG-RANGE VOCATIONAL PLANS OF THE VOLUNTEERS

As previously noted, the majority of Volunteers in the sample planned to return to school either to complete college or enter graduate school. Another smaller group opted to work, mainly in poverty programs, while about 20% rejoined VISTA for another year. This, of course, represents only the Volunteers' immediate short term plans. What are the long range career lines envisioned by the Volunteers at the end of VISTA service? To what extent did their post VISTA vocational choices differ from their goals before entering VISTA? Did VISTA service increase the number of Volunteers electing to enter the helping professions? Disaffect any who had earlier contemplated a helping career? Or cause shifts among the various helping professions themselves?

### Crystallization of Volunteers' Career Plans

Volunteers were asked at the end of their year of service about their major vocational plans before entering VISTA<sup>1</sup> and their plans at the end of the year of

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<sup>1</sup> The possible distortions resulting from this recall method of questioning do not seem significant inasmuch as the question has no discernible emotional content.

service. Approximately 60% of the Volunteers entered with a specific vocational plan in mind, as can be seen in the following table.

However, there were 26 Volunteers (34%) who at the point of entrance into VISTA were undecided about their career choices. Three Volunteers did not plan to enter the labor market after VISTA.

Table 4. Definiteness of Volunteers' Career Plans at Beginning and End of VISTA Year

<u>Type of Plans</u>	<u>Total Volunteers</u>			
	<u>At Beginning</u>		<u>At End Of</u>	
	<u>Of Year</u>		<u>Year</u>	
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Had specific plans	48	62	61	79
Uncertain about plans	26	34	11	14
More than one field of interest	4	5	3	4
"Working with people" -- generalized	5	7	2	2
No clear cut goal	17	22	6	8
Did not plan to enter labor market	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>
	77	100	77	100

As can be seen in the above table, the change in the undecided group is quite significant, and is indicative of the role VISTA plays in helping young people make career decisions. By the end of their year of VISTA service 15 persons, or well over half of those who were uncommitted, had resolved their uncertainties and made a vocational choice. Only 11 Volunteers remained unsure while the number not planning to enter the labor market (chiefly as a result of marriage) rose to five.<sup>1</sup>

What kind of careers did the Volunteers envision before and after VISTA service? Career choices were classified into three categories: helping

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<sup>1</sup> It is of course recognized that varying degrees of firmness are involved in these choices. It is impossible to tell at this time how many Volunteers will actually complete training and enter the professions of their choice, but at least their thinking has been clarified to the extent that they are able to make a commitment.

professions, quasi-helping professions, and "other". Overwhelmingly, the Volunteers as a group were interested in helping professions, both before and after VISTA service. At both points of time, social work and education were the two most popular vocational goals. The following table shows the career choices of the Volunteers who specifically stated one or more fields of endeavor at the beginning and end of the VISTA year.

Table 5. Specific Career Choices at  
Beginning and End of VISTA Year

<u>Career Choice</u>	<u>Number and Proportion of Volunteers at:</u>			
	<u>Beginning of Year</u>		<u>End of Year</u>	
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Helping Professions</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>43</u>	<u>70</u>
Social Work	12	25	19	31
Education	13	27	18	29
Health services				
physical (medicine, dentistry)	4	8	2	3
mental (psychology)	1	2	3	5
Library Science	1	2	1	2
<u>Quasi-helping professions</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>15*</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>15</u>
Social Science <sup>1</sup>	3	6	4	7
Law <sup>2</sup>	4	8	5	8
<u>Other</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>21*</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>15</u>
Business (managerial and clerical)	2	4	5	8
Communications	2	4	1	2
Arts (theatre, writing)	3	6	1	2
Physical science (chemistry, biology)	3	6	2	3
Number of Cases <sup>3</sup>	48		61	

\* Percentages do not add to totals due to rounding.

<sup>1</sup> Public administration, government service and research in urban affairs.

<sup>2</sup> Two of the five electing law already had LLB's.

<sup>3</sup> Not included are four Volunteers who reported more than one choice at the beginning of the year and three who did so at the end of the year. In addition, there were 26 Volunteers at the beginning and 16 Volunteers at the end who did not mention a specific field or were not planning to enter the labor market.



When looked at over time, both the helping and quasi-helping professions showed an increase in total number of adherents, while the number choosing "other" careers decreased by one. It would appear that the year's exposure to a real job in a helping setting reinforced the career plans of Volunteers originally oriented towards service and opened new doors in the helping or quasi-helping professions for Volunteers whose career plans were vague or unspecified.

Of the 43 Volunteers who chose a helping profession at the end of the VISTA year, 37 were headed for vocations in social work and education. Social work was the choice of 19 and showed the largest single gain of any field in both numbers and proportion of Volunteers. (An increase of 7 persons or 59% from the beginning to the end of the year).

#### Shifts in Career Plans During the Year

Looking only at the distributions of career choices before and after conceals to a considerable extent the amount of shift which occurred. Not only did Volunteers without specific careers in mind become clear about the field they wished to enter, but there was considerable shifting from field to field among Volunteers who started VISTA with preconceived vocational plans.

Tracing movement, individual by individual, we find that forty of the 77 respondents, or over half, were involved in some kind of career shift. This suggests that while the Volunteers undoubtedly entered VISTA leaning heavily toward helping careers they were far from committed to a specific field within the broad area of the helping professions. When we consider that for many Volunteers, VISTA represents a period of trial and experiment the degree of change is understandable.

Table 6. Volunteers Who Changed Specific Field  
Of Choice During the Year in VISTA

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Changed plans	40	51.9
Did not change plans	<u>37</u>	<u>48.1</u>
	77	100.0

As one would expect, shifts were more often reported by the younger, less educated Volunteers. Volunteers 22 and over, most of whom were college graduates, more rarely changed their minds about their future direction. Females were no more apt to change plans than males.

But what of those who changed their vocational sights? What was the nature of the changes? As the following table shows, 30 of the 40 respondents who shifted eventually came to choose a helping profession, five a non-helping field, while five were undecided or did not intend to work.

Table 7. Distribution of Volunteers Who  
Changed Career Choice<sup>1</sup>

<u>Type of Change</u>	<u>Number of Volunteers</u>	<u>Percent of Total</u>
<u>Final Choice Helping or Quasi-helping</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>75</u>
Within helping field	15	38
Non-helping to helping	3	7
Undecided to helping	12	30
<u>Final Choice Non-helping</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>12.5</u>
Within non-helping field	1	2
Helping to non-helping	2	5
Undecided to non-helping	2	5
<u>All other (undecided, does not intend to work)</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>12.5</u>
Total	40	100

<sup>1</sup> This table includes two persons who indicated a desire to work in the helping professions although they did not specify the exact field.

In the case of the helping and quasi-helping professions considerable movement took place both within the area and into the area. (Fifteen Volunteers shifted among the various helping professions while twelve Volunteers who entered VISTA uncommitted with respect to a career eventually selected one of the helping or quasi-helping professions). The movement from helping to non-helping or undecided to non-helping was extremely limited. It would appear that much career exploration occurs during a typical service year and that VISTA offers unique opportunities for interested Volunteers. By the end of the year most respondents had crystallized their vocational choices and overwhelmingly these choices lay within the helping framework.

#### Social Work and Education As Career Choices

Ninety percent of the respondents going into the helping professions elected either social work or education. For a closer look at how this process of choice occurred see the following table:

Table 8. Number of Volunteers Who Chose Social Work And Education At Beginning And End of VISTA Year

	<u>Number of Volunteers</u>	
	<u>Social Work</u>	<u>Education</u>
Chose field prior to VISTA	12	13
Chose field at end of VISTA	19	18
Originally chose field	8	9
Originally undecided as to career	2	5
Originally chose another helping field	8	3
Originally chose a non-helping field	1	1
New recruits to field during year	11	9
Moved out of field during year	4	4
Net gain in recruits	+7	+5

Of the 12 persons originally choosing social work and the 13 choosing education four moved out of each of these fields by the end of the VISTA year.

In the case of social work the largest number of new recruits came from another helping field. Apparently for these Volunteers social work became the more relevant way to give effective assistance to the poor. Education, however, drew more of its new recruits from the originally undecided group (5), with fewer moving over from another helping field. Volunteer comments indicate that Volunteers who had never even thought in terms of teaching became convinced of its relevance during their VISTA experience with children.

Although social work and education were popular choices among the women Volunteers, the number of male Volunteers attracted to social work is significant. At the beginning of the VISTA year only three men indicated a preference for social work. By the end of the year, the number of men choosing social work had tripled and of the nineteen social work recruits nine were men.

Table 9. Volunteers Choosing Social Work and Education  
Distributed by Sex

	<u>Social Work</u>		<u>Education</u>	
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
At Beginning of Year	3	9	5	8
At End of Year	9	10	4	14

The number of male volunteers is somewhat striking when considered in the light of previous research which found that people oriented professions such as social work tend to attract more women than men in our society.<sup>1</sup>

#### Effect of VISTA Job on Volunteers' Long Range Career Plans

In an effort to isolate some of the factors in the VISTA situation which might effect career choice, the type of job held by the Volunteer was contrasted with future plans.

A typology of jobs was constructed including such factors as setting,

<sup>1</sup> Arnulf M. Pins, op. cit., pp. 30 and 31.

principal tasks and profession of supervisor. Three classifications emerged as follows:

Direct Service -- principally counselling, interviewing in behalf of individuals or groups, or leading recreation or self-help groups -- most usual setting, established social agencies, generally supervised by social worker.

Community Organization -- organizing community groups for social action -- occurring both in traditional social agencies and in newer OEO anti-poverty agencies, most frequently supervised by social worker.

Teaching -- working directly with children or adults in teaching role or assisting teachers, occurring principally in educational settings including schools and vocational training programs. Teachers and principals generally act as supervisors.

When the job held by the Volunteer as classified above was contrasted with the Volunteer's final career choice, no clear pattern of relationship emerges. (See table 10 below).

Table 10. Relationship Between Type of VISTA Job  
Held by Volunteer and Future Vocational Plans

<u>Vocational Plans</u>	<u>Volunteers Holding Each Type of Job</u>					
	<u>Teaching</u>		<u>Service</u>		<u>Community</u>	
	<u>Ass't.</u>	<u>Teach</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Organ.</u>	<u>#</u>
Helping Professions	10	56	23	59	10	53
Social work	2	11	10	25	7	37
Education	7	39	9	23	2	11
Other	1	6	4	11	1	5
Quasi-helping	1	6	4	11	4	22
Non-helping	2	11	6	15	1	5
Uncertain or not planning to enter labor market	<u>5</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>21</u>
Total	18	100	40	100	19	100

Of the 18 Volunteers engaged in some form of teaching, 7 (39%) chose to remain in education, but 11 (34%) were scattered among other career choices. A similar pattern of dispersion is evident among the community organizers, although there is a tendency toward some polarization between social work and the quasi-helping professions of law and government. (In their comments some "community organizers" questioned whether law and politics were not a more effective way of meeting poverty needs than social work).

In the case of Volunteers involved in giving direct service, about equal numbers chose social work (10) and education (9). Many of the volunteers working with groups were involved in recreational programs with children and adolescents. As has been noted, teaching was seen by some to be the most direct way of meeting the needs of the children with whom they worked.

Given the apparent lack of relationship between VISTA job tasks or setting and final career choice, it appears that it is the totality of the helping process in which Volunteers are involved that is most controlling.

#### THE IMPACT OF THE VISTA YEAR

Volunteers reported overwhelmingly that VISTA had a strong influence in shaping their future plans. Sixty-one of the seventy-seven Volunteers declared that their educational or vocational plans had been changed or modified since entering VISTA and that these changes were brought about in some way by their VISTA experience.

To elaborate on the relationship of VISTA experience to career modifications, Volunteers were asked in an open-ended question to specify how the VISTA experience influenced these changes.



The replies, though varied, fell generally into three broad areas:

- ... changes due to increased knowledge and experience with the world, particularly poverty.
- ... changes arising from Volunteers' new or enlarged perception of themselves and their potentials.
- ... changes resulting from exposure to new professions, skilled professionals and clarification of professional goals.

In many cases the Volunteers found it difficult to talk only about the impact of VISTA on future plans and the statements often became more generalized expressions of the effect of their total being. Considering the strength of the VISTA experience, this is not surprising.

#### INCREASE IN KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

The expansion of factual knowledge and increased experience was cited by the largest number of Volunteers as the major impact of the VISTA year. By exposing the Volunteers to new people, geographic areas, new ways of life and particularly to urban problems and poverty, the Volunteers' viewpoint was broadened and they began to see the world through new eyes.

"Prior to VISTA, I was interested only in Children's dramatics. Now this is a secondary interest. Just the exposure to poverty, crime, the big city atmosphere made me more concerned with the deterioration of society in America and the future of the world."

#### CHANGES IN SELF IMAGE

The impact of the VISTA experience in self-actualization and perception of self was felt to be considerable. (Interestingly, significantly more male Volunteers than female Volunteers sounded this note. Perhaps the finding of

self is more difficult for young men in our society and the VISTA experience therefore more relevant in this respect for them.)

Volunteers reported gaining new perspective of one's self -- "I had the desire to help the underprivileged, but was not too sure that I would be able to do it. Now I know I can. I relate well, I loved the people and living in the ghetto was the best education I could have had. "

Maturation, new appreciation for advanced training and the need to obtain a degree were also frequently mentioned. "This year has given me a chance to become involved with people and has shown me that I can be successful in working with people. "

#### CLARIFICATION OF PROFESSIONAL GOAL

The VISTA experience, by offering Volunteers an opportunity to work directly with people helped some Volunteers clarify their major goals. People became more challenging than labs, money-oriented professions or abstract thinking. As one Volunteer summarized it: "There is more of a challenge and reward in seeing a grin on a jam-smeared face than watching a bubble crawl up the side of a test-tube. "

Other Volunteers identified with the professionals they worked with and wished to continue in the field. "I saw the schools in a light I never had before and I thought (I still think) that there might be a place for me in them, or "My work connected with the Cleveland Board of Education showed me how important quality education can be in reducing poverty. "

Some discovered a direction or specialization in a field. "After working with adults for a year and one abortive attempt to work with junior high school

students, I am beginning to think I prefer to continue to work with adults. "

Some changes in professional choice were based, however, on negative considerations. Several Volunteers became disillusioned with social work -- "Met poor professionals and did not want to associate with such people. " or "Many of the people in social work field are not doing a proper job for many reasons such as apathy, red tape and the wrong basic attitudes towards the people they are serving. "

Still other Volunteers indicated that although their career plans were not significantly altered, their VISTA experience has made them more secure and comfortable in their chosen fields. "I think the VISTA experience enlarged my world by allowing me to see and do things I would not have been aware of (east coast cultures, poverty areas, the vicissitudes of attempts at humanistic progress, a more real grasp of my limitations and my abilities). My plans are not actually changed but I feel better equipped. "

3. Now specifically in terms of the next 12 months, what do you expect to be doing? (Check all appropriate choices below, but be sure to read all possibilities before checking):

\_\_\_\_ Rejoin VISTA      \_\_\_\_ same assignment  
\_\_\_\_ new assignment: SPECIFY LOCATION  
AND TYPE \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Attend school: name of school \_\_\_\_\_  
location of school \_\_\_\_\_  
date entering (month) \_\_\_\_\_ (year) \_\_\_\_\_  
degree working for \_\_\_\_\_  
field of specialization \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Work: place of employment \_\_\_\_\_  
location \_\_\_\_\_  
type of position \_\_\_\_\_  
working: Full time \_\_\_\_\_ Part time \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Military Service

\_\_\_\_ Other: Specify

\_\_\_\_ Plans unknown or not yet decided: Briefly list the alternatives you are considering in the order of preference. (If applying to school, indicate the type of school, the degree you will be working for and the field of specialization. If considering work, indicate type of employment, location and position desired)

4. Thinking back over your year in VISTA what do you feel have been the major contributions you have made?

5. What has been the most difficult part about being a VISTA Volunteer?

## APPENDIX A

Training Class ID# \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address at which you can be reached during following year (1966-1967)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1. When you entered VISTA what were your major educational plans?  
Your major vocational plans? What are your plans now?

### Educational Plans

Prior to entering VISTA:

Now:

### Vocational Plans

Prior to entering VISTA:

Now:

2. If your plans have changed or been modified since entering VISTA, do you believe the changes were brought about in any way by your VISTA experience? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

IF YES: In what manner? What specific aspects of the VISTA experience influenced the changes?



6. In the long run, whom do you think will be the principle beneficiary from VISTA? Do you feel that you as a Volunteer will be the main beneficiary, that both the VISTAs and the community will benefit about equally, or that the most important beneficiary will be the poor. Please explain the reasons for your choice-

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of financial assistance for needy Volunteers; advanced college or graduate credit for certain aspects of VISTA experience and cooperative programs between graduate school and VISTA, so that VISTA training is considered part of graduate education.

Although to date VISTA has attracted mainly white Volunteers, the number of Negro and Puerto Rican VISTAS is growing. Particular attention needs to be paid to VISTA as a recruitment source for sorely needed professional candidates from minority group and deprived backgrounds. Where such Volunteers have shown outstanding competence in helping roles, their VISTA record might be considered as compensation for possible educational deficiencies.

For VISTA, itself, the findings have significant implications for the recruitment of new Volunteers. If in fact, VISTA service acts to clarify career goals and enables Volunteers to serve as apprentices under professional supervision in a real work setting, these points are well worth making to potential recruits. Many college graduates, college dropouts and older people alike would welcome the opportunity afforded by VISTA to test vocational interests. The process of self-discovery and self-actualization which takes place in VISTA in no way detracts from the Volunteers' ability to serve the poor. On the contrary, commitment to a career in a helping or quasi-helping profession, based on realistic knowledge of what is involved, can only result in more and better service for those in need.